

The Lee Building

Once an important retail anchor in downtown De Pere, the Lee Store closed its doors in the mid-1980s. This left a tremendous void in downtown De Pere's retail mix and a large, vacant building that soon developed maintenance problems due to its under utilization. The Lee Corporation, made up of 19 local investors, formed to purchase and restore the building. The investors purchased shares for \$10,000 each, which allowed the group to buy the building for \$240,000.



Lee Building, before.

De Pere Main Street's Design Committee provided design assistance to the corporation. Work on the 26,000-square foot building was

extensive. Blocked-in windows were reopened, and the storefront was completely rebuilt. An elevator was added to the interior along with new plumbing, electrical, furnaces, flooring,



The Lee Building, after.

walls, and ceilings. The restoration cost approximately \$650,000. De Pere Main Street's Economic Restructuring Committee used the downtown market analysis to assist them in identifying the right type of businesses for the Lee Building. They focused on the



Lee Building, interior.

\$8 million leakage of apparel sales De Pere was experiencing. The committee was very selective in its recruitment efforts. Several businesses were actually turned down.

On October 1, 1993, the first retailers opened for business in the Lee building. Each business has its own unique feel. One business has exposed brick walls, another has hard wood floors, while yet another has crown molding and a replica of the tin ceiling. Plans for the second and third floors of the building include office or residential use.

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For more information, call the Wisconsin Main Street Program at (608) 266-7531.

